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# Humor and Wisdom of Lincoln

John W. Gunn



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# **The Humor and Wisdom of Abraham Lincoln**

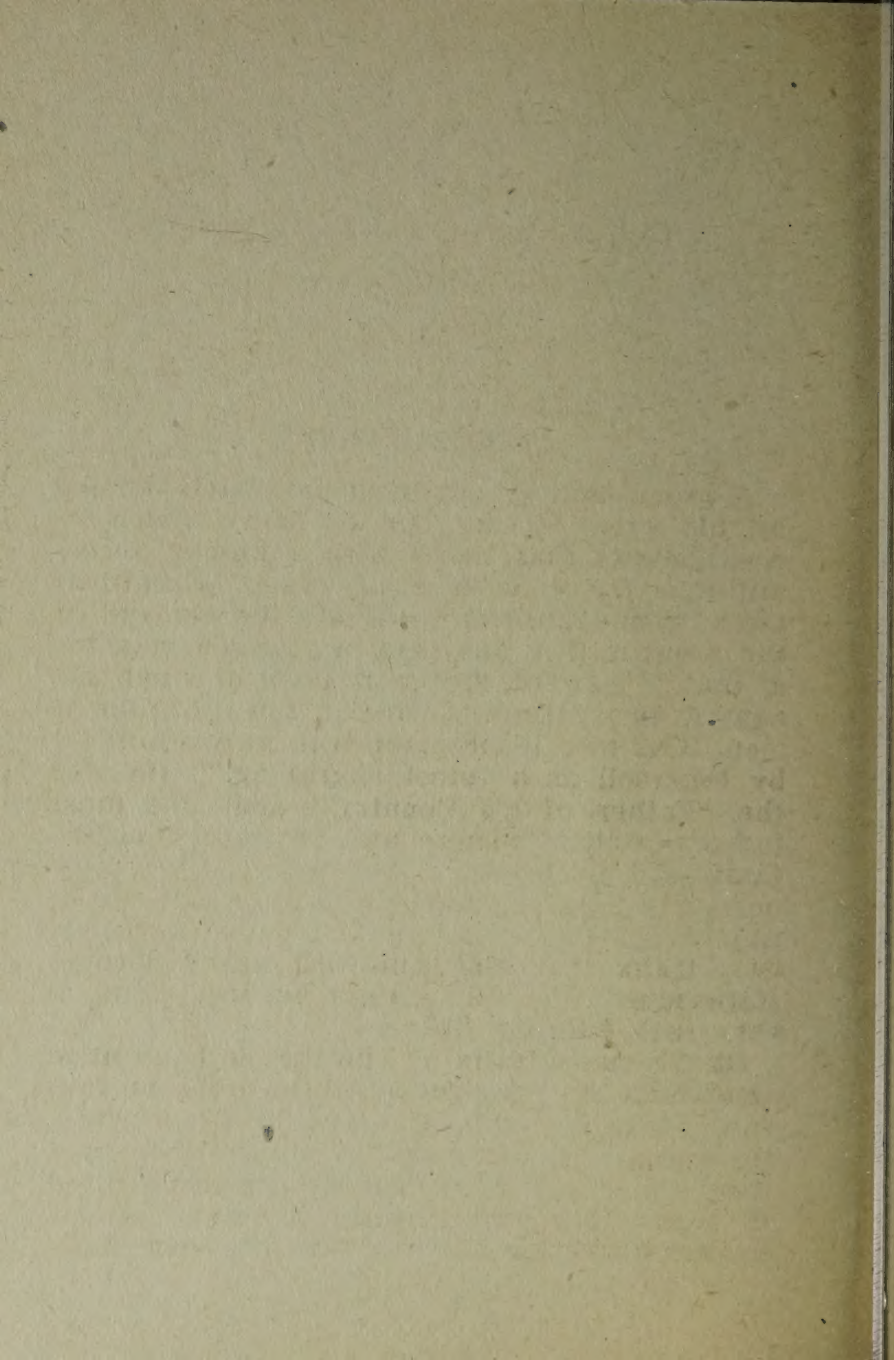
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THE HUMOR AND WISDOM  
OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN



# THE HUMOR AND WISDOM OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN

## I.

### INTRODUCTION.

A great man is not most familiarly known by his great deeds, but by some touch of commonness that lights with a human verisimilitude the cold face of fame. Greatness awes; commonness reassures. We demand of the great man a sign that "a man's a man for a' that." Few of the great ones of earth occupy a very intimate place in the thoughts of men. Our own Washington was truly described by Ingersoll as a "steel engraving." He was the "Father of his Country"—and, like most fathers, a little remote and incomprehensible. Contrast Lincoln with Washington. How much nearer to us in human significance is Lincoln. Lincoln had such human and such characteristic traits that his fame will never become statuesque. He will always be one of us, a very real, friendly figure.

Of the many traits of Lincoln, perhaps none appeals to the imagination of the common man more strongly than his anecdotal tendency. He appears in his most human attitude as a story teller. A story quickly creates a mood of sociability; and through his habit of humorous narration Lincoln wins his way easily

to our hearts, as he did to the hearts of his contemporaries. It is true that we have a more unanimous and unmixed admiration of his humor than did his contemporaries. Many of Lincoln's associates, very dignified and solemn men, were rather shocked and mortified by what they considered the crass levity of Lincoln. They thought the President of the United States should be more grave and circumspect, should wear his office with a weighty consciousness, should not betray the very naturalness that marked Lincoln as greater than his meticulous critics. This sad, kindly, understanding man was regarded by certain excessively polite persons as a buffoon, as a cheap jokester.

It was the quality of Lincoln's humor that disconcerted the wise men of the East. They could understand a discreet and polished wit; a statesman should, to be quite in the best tradition, have a certain proper and gentlemanly air of wit about him; but the direct, unpretentious humor of Lincoln, finding its expression in simple anecdotes and homely illustrations taken from the life of the common people of the Western frontier, was neither graceful nor dignified. Lincoln, in the White House, would tell a story with the same unaffected air that he would use if he were lounging in front of a village grocery store or standing in a country courtroom; moreover, he would actually interrupt important conferences, in the midst of a discussion of most portentous affairs, to relate a crude tale of pioneer life or to read the uproariously farci-

cal sketches of Artemus Ward; his humor was too spontaneous and hearty for the shrinking tastes of men who had been trained to permit themselves only the most guarded display of any feeling.

If the quality of Lincoln's humor was thought to be unfittingly crude and commonplace, its occasions were thought to be inopportune. It was not considered seemly to be facetious during this fateful period of the nation's life, with North and South engaged in a bloody struggle the end of which no man could clearly foresee. Impatience was manifested, too, by congressmen, generals and other dignitaries who, calling to interview the President with a sense of the weight and urgency of their missions, were forestalled or interrupted by a story about some funny experience that had befallen Hank Wilson out in Illinois. When Senator Wade had called at the White House to urge that General Grant be dismissed, Lincoln said, "Senator, that reminds me of a story." "Yes, yes," said Wade, "it is with you, sir, all story, story! You are the father of every military blunder that has been made during the war. You are on your road to hell, sir, with this government, by your obstinacy; and you are not a mile off this minute." Lincoln's effective retort was: "Senator, that is just about the distance from here to the Capitol, is it not?"

We need not be in doubt why Lincoln so frequently turned to anecdotes. When a Congressman, upon the heels of exceedingly bad

news from the army, came to Lincoln and the latter started to tell him a story, the Congressman stood up with the remark: "Mr. President, I did not come here this morning to hear stories; it is too serious a time." At once serious, Lincoln replied: "A——, sit down! I respect you as an earnest, sincere man. You cannot be more anxious than I am constantly, and I say to you now, that were it not for this occasional vent, I should die." It was for relief, then, from the unbearable solemnity of affairs that Lincoln told his stories. Through the channel of humor the flood of Lincoln's emotions gently overflowed, giving him a momentary respite from the excess of grief and care.

He was in peculiar need of the relief of humor. He was by nature a melancholy man, the type of brooding thinker. He was raised on the frontier where man, constantly facing the overbearing elemental facts of Nature, acquires a somber, reflective habit of mind. He was a child of Nature, which is not, as many wrongly presume, to be light-hearted and heedless and gay, but to be thoughtful and melancholy and somewhat fatalistic. There was a great deal of the fatalist in Lincoln, the evidence of which is found in various utterances which show that he felt tragedy lay at the end of his career. He frequently remarked that he had a premonition he would not long outlive the war. Lincoln's life was full of struggle, too, and it left its inevitable marks upon his countenance as well as upon his tender, impressionable mind. It was well, then,

that he could laugh at a good story and find relaxation for his weary spirit in the telling of it. It was well for the nation, too, since this humor fed and kept wholesomely alive the patience, kindness, sympathy and large human understanding of the President. What would he have been without this great emotional protection? What would any of us be without it? It defends our emotional sanity from the worst assaults of time and accident. It kept Lincoln sane and resourceful and alive during his years in the White House, with their vast background of tragedy.

The quality of Lincoln's humor was homely and commonplace, its source the innumerable small incidents of the daily life around him. It was simple and, though absolutely appropriate, was somewhat obvious in its nature. It was not subtle nor profound nor witty in the true sense. It was a very practical sort of humor. It was the type of pioneer humor that distinguishes a community which has not developed a refined artistic sense. The laugh is generally derived from some ridiculous common mishap of man, or from one of those odd yet more or less familiar incongruities which belong with the accidents of life. A man is chased by a bull; finally he catches the bull by the tail, whereupon the animal runs in the other direction, dragging after it the man, who exclaims with a comical air of injury: "Who started this, anyway?"

Such was the humor of Lincoln, a humor plain and rustic. It hits upon immediate natural objects and is enforced by artless meta-

phors derived from homely things. It is remarkably shrewd and apposite. It seldom misses its point. Of all the Lincoln anecdotes there is not one which does not go directly to its purpose. This humor is akin to that of Bill Nye, Artemus Ward and Mark Twain in his more playful moods. It is typical early American humor. If this is not the highest order of humor, it is genuine and deeply characteristic and quite often irresistibly amusing. One must count the influence, too, in the case of a master of narration like Lincoln, of accompanying gestures and facial expression. His stories, to employ a solecism, must have listened better than they read. They were highly useful in one sense: they invariably made clear Lincoln's mental processes, they reinforced a point of argument so directly and forcibly that none could refuse to see. Lincoln was a very busy man and he saved much valuable time that might have been wasted in discussion by immediately going to the heart of a question and revealing it at a stroke. A story that fits the case is often more convincing than the most mighty array of logic.

Closely associated with Lincoln's humor was his shrewd judgment of men and affairs; indeed, it is one of the very good qualities of this pioneer humor that it is based upon a broad understanding of human nature in the rough, without any of the artificial complications and concealments of a sophisticated age. Lincoln had that humor, sympathy and sensible understanding which usually go together.

He laughed with men, loved them and knew their ways of thought and habits of life. There was a profoundly wise sort of humor in his manner of meeting many of the situations that arose while he was in the White House. When a delegate representing unofficially the opinion of certain men of influence in the North, including the governors of a number of states, carried to Lincoln advice regarding the prosecution of the war, Lincoln agreed that, if his adviser would call at the White House the next morning and tell him what he had soberly decided should be done, the policy would be put into effect. The man never kept the appointment; the responsibility shifted to him, he was less certain of what he should do were he in Lincoln's place. There is wisdom and a patient, kindly humor in this incident. It is very Lincoln-like.

As a speaker, the simplicity of Lincoln's utterance has become a model in the use of clear, effective language. His speeches had also a quality of humor that might be more aptly called common sense. His simple way of viewing an issue made the labored sophistries of his opponents appear ridiculously unsound. Lincoln, with his homely sticking to facts and his direct facing of the issue, was able to excel in debate the brilliant and redoubtable Judge Douglas.

Perhaps I have stressed too much the humor of Lincoln. Certainly it was an outstanding characteristic, the touch of Nature that gives us our most intimate glimpse of Lincoln the

statesman. He had also wisdom and eloquence and a great spirit. A fairly good view of Lincoln's personality will be found in the anecdotes that fill the following pages; the purpose of this booklet is to reveal his humor and wisdom by means of careful selections from the most authentic material.

## II.

## THE HUMOR OF LINCOLN.

*From a great deal of material, these selections have been carefully made with a view to completely representing Lincoln's humor and to enlisting most surely the appreciation of the modern reader. The historical value of the anecdotes should be pointed out. They furnish illuminating sidelights upon the early politics of the country, the high points of Lincoln's life in the White House and the various issues, personal and political, of the Civil War. While the material, obviously, is not new, it has been specially written and cast into new form for the pocket series.*

## EXPOSING A DEMAGOGUE.

Colonel Dick Taylor, a Democratic politician, was apparently an artful hand at the demagogic tricks that characterized, with some degree of picturesqueness, the early politics of America. He used the style of personal attack that was then so common; and he posed touchingly as a friend of the plain people, denouncing Lincoln and his group as "rag-barons and manufacturing lords." Going up to the Colonel, Lincoln quickly pulled at his vest. "It displayed to the astonished audience a mass of ruffled shirt, gold watch, chains, seals, and glittering jewels." Lincoln, in contrast, was

attired in rough frontier dress. His reply to the Colonel was devastating:

"Behold the hard-fisted Democrat! Look, gentlemen, at this specimen of the bone and sinew! And here, gentlemen," bowing, with a gesture to indicate his own homely person, "here at your service, here is your aristocrat! Here is one of your silk-stockinged gentry. Here is your rag-baron with his lily-white hands. Yes, I suppose I, according to my friend Taylor, am a bloated aristocrat.

"While Colonel Taylor was making his charges against the Whigs over the country, riding in fine carriages, wearing ruffled shirts, kid gloves, massive gold watch-chains with large gold seals, and flourishing a gold-headed cane, I was a poor boy, hired on a flat-boat at eight dollars a month, and had only one pair of breeches to my back, and they buckskin. Now, if you know the nature of buckskin, when wet and dried by the sun it will shrink, and my breeches kept shrinking until they left several inches of my legs bare, between the tops of my socks and the lower part of my breeches; and while I was growing taller they were becoming shorter, and so much tighter that they left a blue streak around my legs that can be seen to this day. If you call this aristocracy, I plead guilty to the charge."

### COULDN'T TELL A GOOD LIE.

Replying to a political circular sent out by Shields, Democratic State Auditor of Illinois, Lincoln declared:

"I say it's a lie, and not a well-told one at that. It grins out like a copper dollar. Shields is a fool as well as a liar. With him truth is out of the question, and as for getting a good, bright, passable lie out of him, you might as well strike fire from a cake of tallow."

#### WILD-CAT MONEY.

A story was told by Lincoln to illustrate the worthlessness of wild-cat currency that was circulated in the very early days of the West. The wood supply on a Mississippi steamboat was nearly diminished and the captain had the boat brought to shore by the first pile of wood that was sighted on the bank. The captain bargained as follows with the owner of the wood: "Is that your wood?" "Certainly." "You want to sell it?" "Yes." "Will you accept currency?" "Certainly." "How will you take it?" "Cord for cord."

#### GRANDFATHER AND GRANDSON.

Lincoln's innate democracy was humorously expressed in this remark about his ancestry: "I don't know who my grandfather was, and I am much more concerned to know what his grandson will be."

#### A "SMALL CROP OF FIGHT."

A very good example of Lincoln's witty resourcefulness as a lawyer was given by Chauncey M. Depew: "President Lincoln told me once that, in his judgment, one of the two

best things he ever originated was this. He was trying a case in Illinois where he appeared for a prisoner charged with assault and battery. The complainant had told a horrible story of the attack, which his appearance fully justified, when the district attorney handed the witness over to Mr. Lincoln for cross-examination. Mr. Lincoln said he had no testimony, and unless he could break down the complainant's story he saw no way out. He had come to the conclusion that the witness was a bumptious man, who rather prided himself upon his smartness in repartee, and so, after looking at him for some minutes, he inquired. 'Well, my friend, what ground did you and my client here fight over?' The fellow answered, 'About six acres.' 'Well,' said Mr. Lincoln, 'don't you think this is an almighty small crop of fight to gather from such a big piece of ground?' The jury laughed, the court and district-attorney and complainant all joined in, and the case was laughed out of court."

#### THE OTHER FELLOW STARTED IT.

By a story told in an assault case, Lincoln produced a clever and effective analogy. His client, he said, was in a similar situation to a man who, walking along the road with a pitchfork over his shoulder, was attacked by a farmer's dog. Defending himself with his pitchfork, the man stabbed and killed the dog.

"What made you kill my dog?" the farmer asked.

"What made him bite me?"

"But why did you not go after him with the other end of the pitchfork?"

"Why did he not come at me with his other end?"

Turning quickly, Lincoln thrust an imaginary dog tail-end at the jury. A long argument would not have so clearly presented the well-known defense that the other fellow began the trouble.

#### THE JUDGE LAUGHED, TOO.

A picture of Lincoln, the irrepressible story teller, is found in the reminiscence of a court clerk:

"I was never fined but once for contempt of court. Davis fined me five dollars. Mr. Lincoln had just come in, and leaning over my desk had told me a story so irresistibly funny that I broke out into a loud laugh. The Judge called me to order, saying, 'This must be stopped. Mr. Lincoln, you are constantly disturbing this court with your stories.' Then to me: 'You may fine yourself five dollars.' I apologized, but told the Judge the story was worth the money. In a few minutes the Judge called me to him. 'What was that story Lincoln told you' he asked. I told him, and he laughed aloud in spite of himself. 'Remit your fine,' he ordered."

#### A MARRYING JUSTICE OF THE PEACE.

When an opposing lawyer in a case argued that precedent was greater than law and that custom legalized all things, Lincoln demolished

this position with one of his delightfully apposite stories that is also humorously descriptive of a type of rural character in those days. The story is:

"Old Squire Bagley, from Menard, came into my office one day and said:

"'Lincoln, I want your advice as a lawyer. Has a man what's been elected justice of the peace a right to issue a marriage license?'

"I told him no; whereupon the old squire threw himself back in his chair very indignantly and said:

"'Lincoln, I thought you was a lawyer. Now, Bob Thomas and me had a bet on this thing, and we agreed to let you decide; but if this is your opinion I don't want it, for I know a thunderin' sight better. I've been a squire eight years, and I've issued marriage licenses all the time.'"

### A HORSE TRADE.

Lincoln and a judge were having a friendly contest of wits on the subject of horses, when Lincoln said:

"Well, look here, Judge! I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll make a horse trade with you, only it must be upon these stipulations: Neither party shall see the other's horse until it is produced here in the courtyard of the hotel and both parties must trade horses. If either party backs out of the agreement, he does so under a forfeiture of twenty-five dollars."

It was agreed, and Lincoln and the judge each left to find a horse for the joking trade,

while a crowd collected to watch the fun. When the judge reappeared there was a great laugh at the incredibly skinny, dejected-looking animal, blind in both eyes, that he led. But the uproar came when Lincoln strode upon the scene with a carpenter's saw-horse on his shoulder. Relieving himself of his burden, Lincoln with a disgusted air scrutinized the judge's animal.

"Well, Judge," he said, "this is the first time I ever got the worst of it in a horse trade."

### DIGNIFIED BUT RATHER CARELESS.

Upon one occasion Lincoln contested a case with Judge Logan, under whom he had studied law. The Judge was a man of great dignity, but was often very careless of his appearance, a trait which Lincoln knew and cleverly made use of in the trial.

"Gentlemen," said Lincoln to the jury, "you must be careful and not permit yourselves to be overborne by the eloquence of the counsel for defense. Judge Logan, I know, is an effective lawyer; I have met him too often to doubt that. But shrewd and careful though he be, still he is sometimes wrong. Since this trial began I have discovered that, with all his caution and fastidiousness, he hasn't knowledge enough to put his shirt on right."

A glance revealed that the Judge had his shirt—the stiff, pleated variety—put on backwards. The dignified Judge, thus made the object of laughter, was of course utterly disconcerted.

## THE LAZIEST MAN.

Major Whitney relates this amusing court scene: "The first term of Davis's court that I attended the Judge was calling through the docket for the first time, in order to dispose of such cases as could be handled summarily, and likewise to sort the chaff from the wheat, when he came across a long bill in chancery, drawn by an excellent but somewhat indolent lawyer. On glancing at it he exclaimed: 'Why, Brother Snap, how did you rake up energy enough to get up such a long bill?'

" 'Dunno, Jedge,' replied the party addressed, squirming in his seat and uneasily scratching his head. The Judge unfolded and held up the bill. 'Astonishing, ain't it? Brother Snap did it. Wonderful—eh, Lincoln?'

"This amounted to an order on Lincoln for a joke at this point, and he was ready, of course—he had to be; he never failed. 'It's like the lazy preacher,' drawled he, 'that used to write long sermons, and the explanation was, he got to writin' and was too lazy to stop.'"

## A JUDGE AND HIS FRIENDS.

A vivid glimpse of the social side of legal life in the early days is furnished by the following reminiscence by Major Whitney: "In the evening all assembled in the Judge's room, where the blazing fagots were piled high and the yule-log was in place, and there were no

strays there, although the door was not locked. Davis's methods were known, and his companions well-defined, and if a novice came he soon found out both. For instance, an unsophisticated person might become attracted to the Judge's room by our noise, supposing it to be 'free for all.' If Davis wanted him he was warmly welcomed, the fattened calf was killed, and the ring put on his finger; but if he was really not desired he was frozen out by the Judge thus: 'Ah, stop a minute, Lincoln! Have you some business, Mr. Dusenberry?' If Mr. Dusenberry should venture, 'Well, no! I came designin'—' Davis would interrupt him: 'Swett, take Mr. Dusenberry out into the hall and see what he wants, and come right back yourself, Swett. Shut the door. Now, go ahead, Lincoln! You got as far as—ha! ha! ha! "She slid down the hill and—" But wait for Swett. Swett! Swett!' called he. 'Hill' (to Lamon), 'call Swett in. Now, Lincoln, go ahead (and so forth). She slid down the hill, you know. Ho! ho! ho!' Any one who knew Davis would recognize this. This was a characteristic scene with Lincoln as the headpiece, though we often discussed philosophy, politics, and other human interests."

### A JUDGE'S OPINION.

Lincoln shrewdly triumphed over Judge Davis on one occasion, which is related by Whitney:

"I remember once that while several of us lawyers were together, including Judge Davis,

Lincoln suddenly asked a novel question regarding court practice, addressed to no one particularly, to which the Judge, who was in the habit certainly of appropriating his full share of any conversation, replied, stating what he understood the practice should be. Lincoln thereat laughed and said, 'I asked that question, hoping that you would answer. I have that very question to present to the court in the morning, and I am very glad to find out that the court is on my side.' "

#### BLANK'S UNSUCCESSFUL DEATH.

Here is another Whitney reminiscence: "At the White House once I was regaling him with local news from Champaign (which he was always ready to hear), and I said: 'Blank is dead; his extremely disloyal sentiments so provoked his neighbors that there was serious talk of inflicting vengeance on him, and he was found dead in bed—caused largely by fright.' This man was an old Whig friend of Lincoln, but the reason of his exit from life's trials amused him. His comment was, 'He died, then, to save his life, it seems.' "

#### THE LIGHTNING ROD.

The quick, resourceful wit of Lincoln, who was always ready to turn the smallest trifle to immediate use, is illustrated by what is said to be his first speech. Friends got him into the race for the state legislature and he, just a country character, emerged from the back-

woods to debate with his opponent in the latter's home town. Passing his opponent's house as he and a friend drove into the town, Lincoln observed a lightning rod on the house—the first he had ever seen. He inquired of his friend the identity and use of the queer object. Beginning the debate, Lincoln's opponent begged his fellow citizens not to take him, an old and tried man, out of the legislature and put in his place an obscure fellow from the backwoods. With the recently observed phenomenon of the lightning rod fresh in his mind, Lincoln said in reply:

"Friends, you don't know very much about me. I haven't had all the advantages that some of you have had; but, if you did know everything about me that you might know, you would be sure that there was nothing in my character that made it necessary to put on my house a lightning rod to save me from the just vengeance of Almighty God."

#### AN ENDLESS CHAIN.

Lincoln, while a member of Congress, took his stand against the Mexican War; and he declared those who argued the war was not a war of aggression made him think of the Illinois farmer who said: "I ain't greedy 'bout land. I only want what jines mine."

#### FAT FACE AND LEAN.

In debating with Douglas, Lincoln said:

"Judge Douglas is of world-wide renown. All the anxious politicians of his party....have

been looking upon him as certainly....to be President of the United States. They have seen in his round, jolly, fruitful face post-offices, land offices, marshalships, and cabinet appointments and foreign missions bursting and spreading out in wonderful exuberance, ready to be laid hold of by their greedy hands. And as they have been gazing upon this attractive picture so long they cannot, in the little distraction that has taken place in the party, bring themselves to give up the charming hope, but with greedier anxiety they rush about him, sustain him and give him marches, triumphal entries and receptions, beyond what in the days of his highest prosperity they could have brought about in his favor. On the contrary, nobody has ever expected me to be President. In my poor, lean, lank face nobody has ever seen that any cabbages were sprouting."

#### BOTH SIDES OF THE BAR.

Douglas once thought to score off Lincoln by relating how, when he first knew him, Lincoln was a "grocery-keeper," selling among other things whiskey and cigars. "Mr. L.," said Douglas, "was a very good bartender!" But the laugh was on the other side when Lincoln made the following reply:

"What Mr. Douglas has said, gentlemen, is true enough; I did keep a grocery, and I did sell cotton, candles and cigars, and sometimes whiskey; but I remember in those days that Mr. Douglas was one of my best customers.

Many a time have I stood on one side of the counter and sold whiskey to Mr. Douglas on the other side, but the difference between us now is this: I have left my side of the counter, but Mr. Douglas still sticks to his as tenaciously as ever."

### THE PROPER LENGTH OF LEGS.

From discussing the physical peculiarities of Douglas, who was a very small man, a group of Lincoln's friends turned to the question of how long a man's legs should be. Upon Lincoln's joining the group, he was asked the question.

"Well," he said, "I should think a man's legs ought to be long enough to reach from his body to the ground."

### LETTING STANTON JUMP.

When complaints were made to Lincoln of the strenuous dictatorial methods of Secretary of War Stanton, Lincoln made this comparison:

"We may have to treat Stanton as they are sometimes obliged to treat a Methodist minister I know out West. He gets wrought up to so high a pitch of excitement in his prayers and exhortations that they put bricks in his pockets to keep him down. But I guess we'll let him jump awhile first."

## SOMETHING FOR THE OFFICE SEEKERS.

A host of office seekers besieged the White House at the start of Lincoln's administration. With his aptness for simile, the President said he was in the position of a man who was so busy letting rooms in one end of his house that he had no time to put out a fire in the other end. However, when he was attacked by the varioloid he thus instructed his usher:

"Tell all the office seekers to come and see me, for now I have something that I can give them."

## THE JONESVILLE POST OFFICE.

It was absurd of course that in the midst of civil war, President Lincoln should have to bother himself with many details of political patronage. But the Democrats had enjoyed a long incumbency in federal jobs and now the Republicans were a greedy and impatient horde that constantly annoyed the President. The irony of it was well conveyed by Lincoln. One day when the President was standing in a pensive attitude, a Senator remarked:

"Has anything gone wrong, Mr. President? Have you heard bad news from Fort Sumter?"

"No," replied the President with a solemn air, "it's the post-office at Jonesville, Missouri."

## AN EXAMINATION FOR DOORKEEPER.

To a man who asked for the job of doorkeeper in the House of Representatives, the

President, with the best of humor, addressed the following catechism:

"So you want to be doorkeeper of the House, eh?"

"Yes, Mr. President."

"Well, have you ever been a doorkeeper? Have you ever had any experience of door-keeping?"

"Well, no—no actual experience, sir."

"Any theoretical experience? Any instructions in the duties and ethics of doorkeeping?"

"Umph—no."

"Have you ever attended lectures on door-keeping?"

"No, sir."

"Have you read any text on the subject?"

"No."

"Have you conversed with anyone who has read such a book?"

"No, sir; I'm afraid not, sir."

"Well, then, my friend, don't you see that you haven't a single qualification for this important post?" said Lincoln with an air of patient reasonableness.

"Yes, I do," admitted the applicant, who turned away, as one might say, "a sadder but a wiser man."

#### A SICKER MAN.

To a delegation who begged the commission-ship of the Sandwich Islands for a certain man, urging that besides being a qualified man he was in bad health, the President said:

"Gentlemen, I am sorry to say that there are eight other applicants for the place and they are all sicker than your man."

## NEW JERSEY IN DANGER.

A Congressman from New Jersey brought two citizens of that state to see the President, out of idle curiosity, remarking as he introduced them: "Mr. President, this is Mr. X. and Mr. Y., and they are among the weightiest men in Southern New Jersey." Upon their departure, Lincoln observed: "I wonder that end of the state didn't tip up when they got off it."

## A PARABLE OF AMBITION.

When government officials, who wished to secure the transfer of control over certain funds from other hands into their own, approached the President with this request, he met them with this story:

"You are very much like a man in Illinois whose cabin was burned down, and, according to the kindly custom of early days in the West, his neighbors all contributed something to start him again. In his case they had been so liberal that he soon found himself better off than before the fire, and got proud. One day a neighbor brought him a bag of oats, but the fellow refused it with scorn, and said, 'I am not taking oats now; I take nothing but money.'"

## A BOTTLE OF HAIR RESTORER.

A Philadelphia man, an unmitigated bore, had repeatedly encroached upon the President's time, until the latter at last got rid of him by a

simple and amusing expedient. The story was told by Justice Carter of the Supreme Court of the District of Columbia. On this day many delegations were waiting to see the President, but this man stayed and talked. Finally Lincoln walked over to a wardrobe in the corner of the Cabinet chamber, and, taking a bottle from the shelf, remarked to the man, who was bald-headed:

"Did you ever try this stuff for your hair?"

"No, sir, I never did."

"Well, I advise you to try it and I will give you this bottle. If at first you don't succeed, try, try again. Keep it up. They say it will make hair grow on a pumpkin. Now take it and come back in eight or ten months and tell me how it works."

The man, nonplussed, took the bottle and left without further speech. Judge Carter, coming in with a delegation, found the President in a fit of laughter.

### A VERY PARTICULAR JUDGE.

The artist, Frank B. Carpenter, who painted a picture of the Cabinet assembled to hear the Emancipation Proclamation and witness the signature of the President to this historic document, told the following story:

"One evening the President brought a couple of friends into the 'state dining room' to see my picture. Something was said in the conversation that ensued that 'reminded' him of the following circumstance: 'Judge ——,' he said, 'held the strongest ideas of rigid gov-

ernment and close construction that I ever met. It was said of him on one occasion that he would hang a man for blowing his nose in the street, but he would quash the indictment if it failed to specify which hand he blew it with!"

### TAKING COUNSEL.

A friend thought Lincoln took much counsel with David Davis, Judge of the Circuit Court, but Lincoln enlightened him with the following story: "They had side judges down in New Hampshire, and to show the folly of the system, one who had been a side judge for twenty years said the only time the chief judge ever consulted him was at the close of a long day's session, when he turned to the side judge and whispered, "Don't your back ache?" "

### THE SAME STAR.

When Noah Brooks had carefully explained to the President how a California politician had unwittingly been led into speaking the truth, the President recalled a similar circumstance about a Negro barber in Illinois, who was a great liar. A crowd in front of the barber shop stood one evening gazing with admiration at the planet Jupiter. "Sho," said the barber, "I've seen that star before. I seen him 'way down in Georgy." Said Lincoln: "Like your California friend, he told the truth, but thought he was lying."

## MORE THAN HALF RIGHT.

At one of the public receptions in the White House, an old gentleman from Buffalo, as he shook hands with the President, remarked: "Up our way we believe in God and Abraham Lincoln." To this the President characteristically replied: "My friend, you are more than half right."

## A CHANGE OF COATS.

Replying to an invitation to attend a Jefferson anniversary affair, the President said in part: "I remember once being much amused at seeing two partially intoxicated men engaged in a fight with their coats on, which fight, after a long and harmless contest, resulted in each having fought himself out of his coat and into that of the other. If the two leading parties of this day are really identical with the two of the days of Jefferson and Adams, they have performed the same feat as the two drunken men."

## A DRY BATH.

Speaking in eulogy of Lincoln at a New York dinner a noted literary man illustrated the President's simplicity and sense:

"Lincoln could not stand tedious writing in others. He once condemned for its tediousness a Greek history, whereupon a diplomat took him to task. 'The author of that history, Mr. President, is one of the profoundest scholars of the age. Indeed, it may be doubted whether

any man of our generation has plunged more deeply in the sacred fount of learning,' 'Yes, or come up drier,' said Lincoln."

### THE SAME THREE FELLOWS.

This story was told by Adlai E. Stevenson:

"Several months before President Lincoln issued the great Proclamation of Emancipation which gave freedom to the whole race of Negro slaves in America, my friend, Senator Henderson of Missouri, came to the White House one day and found Mr. Lincoln in a mood of deepest depression. Finally the great President said to his caller and friend that the most constant and acute pressure was being brought upon him by the leaders of the radical element of his party to free the slaves.

" 'Sumner and Stevens and Wilson simply haunt me,' declared Mr. Lincoln, 'with their importunities for a proclamation of emancipation. Wherever I go and whatever way I turn, they are on my trail. And still, in my heart, I have the deep conviction that the hour has not yet come.'

"Just as he said this he walked to the window looking out upon Pennsylvania Avenue and stood there in silence, his tall figure silhouetted against the light of the window pane, every line of it and of his gracious face expressive of unutterable sadness. Suddenly his lips began to twitch into a smile and his somber eyes lighted with a twinkle of something like mirth.

" 'The only schooling I ever had, Henderson,' he remarked, 'was in a log schoolhouse when

reading-books and grammars were unknown. All our reading was done from the Scriptures, and we stood up in a long line and read in turn from the Bible. Our lesson one day was the story of the faithful Israelites who were thrown into the fiery furnace and delivered by the hand of the Lord without so much as the smell of fire upon their garments. It fell to one little fellow to read the verse in which occurred, for the first time in the chapter, the names of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego. Little Bud stumbled on Shadrach, floundered on Meshach, and went all to pieces on Abed-nego. Instantly the hand of the master dealt him a cuff on the side of the head and left him wailing and blubbering as the next boy in line took up the reading. But before the girl at the end of the line had done reading he had subsided into sniffles, and finally became quiet. His blunder and disgrace were forgotten by the others of the class until his turn was approaching to read again. Then, like a thunder-clap out of a clear sky, he set up a wail which even alarmed the master, who with rather unusual gentleness inquired:

“‘What’s the matter now?’

“‘Pointing with a shaking finger at the verse which a few moments later would fall to him to read, Bud managed to quaver out the answer:

“‘Look there, marster—there comes them same damn three fellers again.’”

“Then his whole face lighted with such a smile as only Lincoln could give, and he beckoned Senator Henderson to his side, silently

pointing his long, bony finger to three men who were at that moment crossing Pennsylvania Avenue toward the door of the White House. They were Sumner, Wilson and Thaddeus Stevens."

### FACTS ARE FACTS.

To a group of citizens who had called to urge him to emancipate the slaves, the President said it was impossible at that stage of the war, and that proclaiming the Negroes free would not make them free. By way of analogy, he asked his callers: "How many legs will a sheep have if you call the tail a leg?" "Five," was the reply. "You are mistaken," said Lincoln, "for calling a tail a leg don't make it so."

### WHERE THE CARCASS IS.

Hugh McCulloch, Secretary of the Treasury, in Lincoln's second term, called at the White House with a delegation of New York bankers. Stepping ahead of the group, he said quietly to the President:

"These gentlemen from New York have come on to see the Secretary of the Treasury about our new loan. As bankers they are obliged to hold our national securities. I can vouch for their patriotism and loyalty, for, as the good Book says, 'Where the treasure is, there will the heart be also.'

Lincoln's reply was ready: "There is another text, Mr. McCulloch, I remember, that might equally apply: 'Where the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together.'"

## GENERAL M'CLELLAN'S TACTICS.

The dilatoriness of General McClellan was proverbial and gave rise to one of Lincoln's most pointed jokes. A New York man, who had spent a week viewing the Democratic Convention of 1864, in which McClellan was considered as a presidential candidate, called at the White House with the Assistant Secretary of War, Mr. Dana. As they talked, the New York man asked the President: "What do you think, Mr. President, is the reason General McClellan does not reply to the letter from the Chicago Convention?" "Oh," was Lincoln's smiling reply, "he is intrenching!"

## GENERAL GRANT.

General Grant had a record that is rare in military annals. When he once took a place, he never surrendered it. Speaking of this to General Butler, Lincoln said: "When General Grant once gets possessed of a place he seems to hang on to it as if he had inherited it."

## M'CLELLAN'S BODYGUARD.

After the battle of Antietam, when McClellan's army lay unaccountably idle, Lincoln, with his friend, O. M. Hatch of Illinois, went to the front. They stood on a hill from which they could view the vast camp, and Lincoln said:

"Hatch, Hatch, what is all this?"

"Why," said Hatch, "that is the Army of the Potomac."

"No, Hatch, no," said Lincoln, "that is General McClellan's bodyguard."

### CUTTING A FINGER.

Lincoln's stories were always remarkable for their simplicity and fitness. The following story was repeated by General Horace Porter:

"We were discussing the subject of England's assistance to the South, and how, after the collapse of the Confederacy, England would find she had aided it but little and only injured herself. He said: 'That reminds me of a barber in Sangamon County. He had just gone to bed, when a stranger came along and said he must be shaved; that he had four days' beard on his face and was going to a ball, and that the beard must come off. Well, the barber reluctantly got up and dressed, and seated the man in a chair with a back so low that every time he bore down on him he came near dislocating his victim's neck. He began by lathering his face, including his nose, eyes and ears, stropped his razor on his boot, and then made a drive at the man's countenance as if he had practiced mowing in a stubble-field. He made a bold swath across the cheek, carrying away the beard, a pimple, and two warts. The man in the chair ventured the remark, 'You appear to make everything level as you go.' Said the barber, 'Yes, and if this handle don't break, I guess I'll get away with what there is there.' The man's cheeks were so hollow that the bar-

ber could not get down into the valleys with the razor, and the ingenious idea occurred to him to stick his finger in the man's mouth and press out the cheeks. Finally he cut clear through the cheek and into his own finger. He pulled the finger out of the man's mouth, snapped the blood off it, glared at him and said: "There, you lantern-jawed cuss, you've made me cut my finger."

"'Now,' said Mr. Lincoln, 'England will find that she has got the South into a pretty bad scrape by trying to administer to her, and in the end she will find that she has only cut her own finger.'"

### "ROOT, HOG, OR DIE."

When peace terms were being discussed with Southern commissioners (the unsuccessful meeting at which Lincoln is said to have told Alexander H. Stephens that the latter could write any agreement that he wished if he would only let Lincoln write the word "Union" at the beginning of it) one of the commissioners spoke of the chaos that would result from the sudden liberation of the slaves. Idleness would be general, and blacks and white would suffer common starvation. After a pause to give Secretary Seward opportunity to reply to this argument, Lincoln himself replied through the following story:

"Mr. Hunter, you ought to know a great deal better about this matter than I, for you have always lived under the slave system. I can only say, in reply to your statement of the

case, that it reminds me of a man out in Illinois, by the name of Chase, who undertook, a few years ago, to raise a very large herd of hogs. It was a great trouble to feed them, and how to get around this was a puzzle to him. At length he hit upon the plan of planting an immense field of potatoes; and, when they were sufficiently grown, he turned the whole herd into the field and let them have full swing, thus saving not only the labor of feeding the hogs, but that also of digging the potatoes. Charmed with his sagacity, he stood one day leaning against the fence, counting his hogs, when a neighbor came along.

“‘Well, well,’ said he, ‘Mr. Chase, this is all very fine. Your hogs are doing very well just now; but you know out here in Illinois the frost comes early, and the ground freezes a foot deep. Then what are they going to do?’

“This was a view of the matter which Mr. Chase had not taken into account. Butchering time for hogs was away on in December or January. He scratched his head, and at length stammered: ‘Well, it may come pretty hard on their snouts; but I don’t see but it will be root, hog, or die.’”

#### ALEXANDER H. STEPHENS.

The Southern commissioners had dined with President Lincoln and General Grant. When the commissioners left, Alexander H. Stephens (a little man, whose top weight was ninety pounds) enveloped his short, slender form in an English ulster, its tails falling to the ground

and its collar sticking above Stephens' head. As Stephens made his exit, Lincoln exclaimed: "Grant, look at Stephens. Did you ever see such a little nubbin with as much shuck?"

### GENERALS AND MULES.

Receiving news that a brigadier-general and twelve army mules had been captured by the Confederates, Lincoln's comment was: "How unfortunate! Those *mules* cost us two hundred dollars apiece!"

### BURNSIDE'S ARMY STILL ALIVE.

The Northern armies had been inactive for some time, when a telegram came to Lincoln from Cumberland Gap saying that firing had been heard toward Knoxville, where General Burnside was in much peril. Lincoln calmly remarked that he was glad of it. Some one expressing surprise at his remark, Lincoln said:

"You see, it reminds me of Mistress Sallie Ward, a neighbor of mine, who had a very large family. Occasionally one of her numerous progeny would be heard crying in some out-of-the-way place, upon which Mrs. Ward would exclaim, 'There's one of my children not dead yet.'"

### A PATRIOTIC FAMILY.

A woman with a commanding air told Lincoln: "Mr. President, you must give me a colonel's commission for my son. Sir, I de

mand it, not as a favor, but as a right. Sir, my grandfather fought at Lexington. Sir, my uncle was the only man that did not run away at Bladensburg. Sir, my father fought at New Orleans, and my husband was killed at Monterey."

"I guess, madam," said Lincoln, "your family has done enough for the country. It is time to give somebody else a chance."

### "A MAN DOWN SOUTH."

Amid a hand-shaking procession at the White House, the President was unusually preoccupied and when a close friend passed him in the line, his hand was shaken perfunctorily. Seeing that the President did not recognize him, the man simply stood there. Waking from his abstraction, the President gave his friend's hand a vigorous shake and said: "How do you do? Excuse me for not noticing you at first; the fact is, I was thinking of a man down South." The man down South was Sherman, marching through Georgia to the sea.

### GRANT'S DRINKING.

No doubt the best known Lincoln story is his reply to a delegation that demanded the removal of General Grant because he drank. "What does he drink?" asked Lincoln. "Whiskey, and in unusual quantities," was the answer. "Well," said Lincoln, "just find out what particular kind he uses, and I'll send a barrel to each of the other generals." At another time the President said of Grant: "I can't spare that man; he fights."

## THE STRENGTH OF THE REBELS.

To a man who asked how many men the Confederates had in the field, Lincoln replied: "*Twelve hundred thousand, according to the best authority.*" "Good heavens," cried the man. "Yes, sir," repeated Lincoln, "twelve hundred thousand—no doubt of it. You see, all of our generals, when they get whipped, say the enemy outnumbered them from three or five to one, and I must believe them. We have four hundred thousand men in the field, and three times four make twelve. Don't you see it?"

## KEPT HIM UP, NOT DOWN.

This amusing story is told by Noah Brooks: "Returning from a visit to the Army of the Potomac, when its depots were at City Point, I gave an account of my visit to the President, as he had sent me with a special pass to Grant's headquarters. He asked, jocularly, 'Did you meet any colonels who wanted to be brigadiers, or any brigadiers who wanted to be major-generals, or any major-generals who wanted to run things?' Receiving a reply in the negative, he stretched out his hand in mock congratulation, and said, 'Happy man!'

"Afterward an officer who had been attentive to our little party did come to my lodgings and complain that he ought to be promoted, urging, among other things, that his relationship to a distinguished general kept him down. I told the incident to the President, after recalling

his previous questions to me. Lincoln fairly shrieked with laughter, and, jumping up from his seat, cried, 'Keeps him down! Keeps him down! That's all that keeps him up.'"

### III.

#### THE WISDOM OF LINCOLN.

*The humor and wisdom of Lincoln intermingle. The wise and humorous Lincoln was revealed in everything he said or did. In this chapter, however, are those stories and quotations which particularly display Lincoln's keen logic, his peculiar lucidity of vision, his shrewdness as a leader and executive, and his general grasp on life; as well as his supreme sympathy and his never failing kindness—wisdom of the finest and rarest.*

#### SAMBO AND DR. ROSS.

Lincoln's human and direct view of the slavery question is shown by the following excerpt from one of his speeches in the celebrated debate with Douglas:

"The sum of pro-slavery theology seems to be this: 'Slavery is not universally right, nor yet universally wrong; it is better for some people to be slaves; and, in such cases, it is the will of God that they be such.' Certainly there is no contending against the will of God; but still there is some difficulty in ascertaining and applying it to particular cases. For instance, we will suppose the Rev. Dr. Ross has a slave named Sambo, and the question is, 'Is

it the will of God that Sambo shall remain a slave, or be set free?" The Almighty gives no audible answer to the question, and His revelation; the Bible, gives none—or at most none but such that admits a squabble as to His meaning; no one thinks of asking Sambo's opinion about it. So at last it comes to this, that Dr. Ross is to decide the question; and while he considers it he sits in the shade, with gloves on his hands, and subsists on the bread that Sambo is earning in the burning sun. If he decides that God wills Sambo to continue a slave, he thereby retains his own comfortable position; but if he decides that God willed Sambo to be free, he thereby has to walk out of the shade, throw off his gloves, and delve for his own bread. Will Dr. Ross be actuated by the perfect impartiality which has ever been considered most favorable to correct decisions?"

### SEWARD'S "UNIMPORTANT" ADVICE.

Certain eminent and polished men in the East were not at first ready to admit Lincoln to full eligibility as a statesman. They could not conceive that this comparatively unknown, uncouth frontiersman from Illinois could possibly understand the practical handling of the issues of the day as could they, with their infinite and weighty experience. Some of these self-important doubters were in the President's cabinet. Mr. Seward, Secretary of State, was notably alert to advise Lincoln and show him just what to do. He was perfectly prepared,

in his own mind, to act as President, to serve as mentor to this strange, awkward man from the West who had suddenly arisen to dominate the old and respectable political councils of the Nation. Shortly after the war began, Secretary Seward suggested to Lincoln that the latter devote his attention only to military and domestic affairs, permitting Seward to have complete charge of foreign affairs. Seward suggested that he put this in the form of a carefully written proposal to the President; and Lincoln told him to go ahead. Accordingly Seward came one day with his "state paper," very elaborately prepared—folded and endorsed with the assurance that the matter was accomplished. Gravely the President accepted the paper. On his table there was a row of trays, with the respective labels of "Secretary of War," "Secretary of State," etc., the last tray bearing the label "Unimportant." Into the last tray he calmly deposited Seward's weighty communication, remarking that if Seward's suggestions ought to be carried out, he (the President) would execute them. Thus did Lincoln calmly assert his force. One can imagine the chagrin of Seward. But the Secretary soon came to realize the greatness of Lincoln and, writing to his wife, said: "The President is the best of us all."

#### AVOIDING COLLISIONS.

Lincoln was very firm in his convinced stand on essential matters of policy, but in less important matters he was very diplomatic and conciliatory, preferring to avoid useless fric-

tion. His common sense diplomacy was illustrated in a delightfully human way. At a Cabinet meeting Secretary Seward said in a joking manner:

"Mr. President, I hear that you turned out for a colored woman on a muddy crossing the other day."

"I don't remember," replied Lincoln, "but I think it very likely, for I have always made it a rule that if people won't turn out for me I will for them. If I didn't, there would be a collision."

#### "A PUMPKIN IN EACH BAG."

Difficulties with his Cabinet reached such a point toward the end of 1862 that a Senate committee urged the President to solve the situation by making changes in his Cabinet. Despite their differences, Lincoln valued men of ability and he was not prepared at that time to dismiss Seward and Chase, around whom the contention centered. These anxious politicians underestimated Lincoln's shrewdness and independence, and, as Lincoln put it, "While they seemed to believe in my honesty, they appeared to think that when I had in me any good purpose of intention Seward contrived to suck it out of me unperceived." Eventually both Seward and Chase resigned, which enabled Lincoln to propitiate both of the Republican factions. "Now I can ride," he said, "for I have a pumpkin in each bag." He explained his position thus: "If I had yielded to that storm and dismissed Seward, the thing

would all have slumped over one way, and we should have been left with a scanty handful of supporters. When Chase gave in his resignation, I saw that the game was in my hands and put it through."

### GREAT ENOUGH TO BE SIMPLE.

One of the best proofs of Lincoln's greatness was his entire absence of vanity and pride of place. He was great enough to be utterly simple at all times. The dignified form of address, "Mr. President," he did not specially like. When an old friend from Illinois addressed him as "Mr. President," he said, "Now call me Lincoln, and I'll promise not to tell of the breach of etiquette." He spoke of his office as "this place," "since I have been in this place," or "since I came here." Speaking of the room in the Capitol that was set aside for the use of the President, he termed it "the room, you know, that they call the President's room."

### SLAVERY AND THE UNION.

Writing to Horace Greeley, who persistently urged Lincoln to proclaim the freedom of the slaves, Lincoln very tersely explained his policy:

"I would save the Union. I would save it in the shortest way under the Constitution. If there be those who would not save the Union unless they could at the same time save slavery, I do not agree with them. If there be those who would not save the Union unless

they could, at the same time, destroy slavery, I do not agree with them. My paramount object in this struggle is to save the Union, and is not either to save or destroy slavery. If I could save the Union without freeing any slave, I would do it; and if I could do it by freeing all the slaves, I would do it; and if I could save it by freeing some and leaving others alone, I would also do that. What I do about slavery and the colored race, I do because I believe it helps to save the Union; and what I forbear, I forbear because I do not believe it would help to save the Union. I shall do less whenever I believe what I am doing hurts the cause, and I shall do more whenever I believe doing more will help the cause. I shall try to correct errors when shown to be errors, and I shall adopt new views as fast as they shall appear to be true views."

### THE "DOCUMENTS" IN THE CASE.

When the President sent Montgomery Blair, a man very unpopular in the North, with a peace delegation to the South, there was a feeling of doubt and anxiety in many quarters. The situation is thus described by Henry Ward Beecher:

"There was some talk, early in 1864, of a sort of compromise with the South. Blair told the President he was satisfied that, if he could be put in communication with some of the leading men of the South in some way or other, some benefit would accrue. Lincoln had sent a delegation to meet Alexander H. Stephens,

and that was all the North knew. We were all very much excited over that. The war lasted so long, and I was afraid Lincoln would be so anxious for peace, and I was afraid he would accept something that would be of advantage to the South, so I went to Washington and called upon him. 'Mr. Lincoln, I come to you to know whether the public interest will permit you to explain to me what this Southern commission means. I am in an embarrassing position as editor and do not want to step in the dark.' Well, he listened very patiently, and looked up to the ceiling for a few moments, and said, 'Well, I am almost of a mind to show you all the documents.'

" 'Well, Mr. Lincoln, I should like to see them if it is proper.' "

He went to his little secretary and came out and handed me a little card as long as my finger and an inch wide, and on that was written:

" 'You will pass the bearer through the lines (or something to that effect). A. LINCOLN.' "

" 'There,' he said, 'is all there is of it. Now, Blair thinks something can be done, but I don't; but I have no objection to have him try his hand. He has no authority whatever but to go and see what he can do.' "

#### LET THE ELEPHANT RUN.

Charles A. Dana told this story:

"The last time I saw Mr. Lincoln to speak with him was in the afternoon of the day of his murder. I had received a report from the provost-marshal of Portland, Maine, saying that

Jacob Thompson [a Confederate agent] was to be in that town that night for the purpose of taking the steamer for Liverpool, and what orders had the Department to give? I carried the telegram to Mr. Stanton. He said promptly, 'Arrest him;' but as I was leaving his room he called me back, adding, 'You had better take it over to the President.' It was now between four and five o'clock in the afternoon, and business at the White House was completed for the day. I found Mr. Lincoln with his coat off, in a closet attached to his office, washing his hands. 'Hello, Dana,' said he, as I opened the door, 'what is it now?' 'Well, sir,' I said, 'here is the provost-marshal of Portland, who reports that Jacob Thompson is to be in that town tonight, and inquires what orders we have to give.' 'What does Stanton say?' he asked. 'Arrest him,' I replied. 'Well,' he continued, drawling his words, 'I rather guess not. When you have an elephant by the hind foot, and he wants to run away, better let him run.' "

#### WOULD HOLD M'CLELLAN'S HORSE.

General McClellan was a very pompous and jealous man. Often he could not show even ordinary courtesy to the President, so envious was he of the latter's power and place. Once when Lincoln and Seward called at McClellan's headquarters, the General was not in, so they waited. After they had waited an hour, McClellan returned and was told by his orderly that the President and Secretary of State were there to see him. McClellan went on upstairs

and when Lincoln, under the impression that the General had not been told of his callers, sent word to him, the only satisfaction he got was to be told that the General had retired. Again, when McClellan, Ormsby M. Mitchell and Governor Dennison were to meet at the White House, all arrived but McClellan. When the others showed impatience, Lincoln said: "Never mind; I will hold McClellan's horse, if he will only bring us success."

### LINCOLN ENTERING RICHMOND.

This account is given by Carl Schurz:

"Richmond fell. Lincoln himself entered the city on foot, accompanied only by a few officers and a squad of sailors who had rowed him ashore from the flotilla in the James River, a negro picked up on the way serving as a guide. Never had the world seen a more modest conqueror and a more characteristic triumphal procession—no army with banners and drums, only a throng of those who had been slaves, hastily run together, escorting the victorious chief into the capital of the vanquished foe. We are told that they pressed around him, kissed his hands and his garments, and shouted and danced with joy, while tears ran down the President's care-furrowed cheeks."

### GENERAL PICKETT'S WIFE.

When in Richmond, Lincoln inquired for the home of General Pickett, he who led the grand tragic charge of the Confederates at Gettys-

burg. A woman with a baby in her arms met him at the door, and he asked: "Is this where George Pickett lives?" The woman was Mrs. Pickett, and Lincoln told her he had come to see her simply as "Abraham Lincoln, George's old friend." He had known Pickett in Illinois and got him his appointment to West Point.

### GENERAL HOOKER.

To General Hooker, who had taken General Burnside's place, Lincoln wrote:

"I believe you to be a brave and skillful soldier, which, of course, I like. I also believe you do not mix politics with your profession, in which you are right. You have confidence in yourself, which is a valuable, if not indispensable, quality. You are ambitious, which within reasonable bounds does good rather than harm; but I think that during General Burnside's command of the army you have taken counsel with your ambition, and thwarted him as much as you could, in which you did a great wrong to the country, and to a most meritorious and honorable officer. I have heard, in such a way as to believe it, of your recently saying that both the army and the government needed a dictator. Of course, it is not for this, but in spite of it, that I have given you the command. Only those generals who gain successes can set up dictators. What I now ask of you is military success, and I will risk the dictatorship."

### BUTCHER'S DAY.

The generals were constantly complaining to Lincoln that army discipline was threatened by

his multiplicity of pardons. But the President persisted in his merciful attitude. When twenty-four deserters were to be shot in a row, Lincoln, in the face of objection, forbade it, exclaiming: "There are already too many weeping widows; for God's sake, don't ask me to add to the number, for I won't do it." Once, going through a pile of sentences that was on his desk, he said: "Tomorrow is butcher's day, and I must go through these papers and see if I can't find some excuse to let these poor fellows off." Lincoln took a very human view of the army. He knew the wisdom of mercy. He knew, too, that many of the Union soldiers were no more than mere lads, and that to punish them for innocent offenses was not just. Reviewing the case of a boy condemned to be shot for sleeping at his post, he said:

"I could not think of going into eternity with the blood of that poor young man on my skirts. It is not to be wondered at that a boy raised on a farm, probably in the habit of going to bed at dark, should, when required to watch, fall asleep; and I cannot consent to shoot him for such an act."

In pardoning another young soldier, Lincoln wrote this simple line: "Let this woman have her boy."

Another time Lincoln wrote: "What possible injury can this lad work upon the cause of the great Union? I say, let him go."

#### SOME FATHERLY ADVICE.

In reprimanding a young officer who had been court-martialed for quarreling with a fellow

officer, Lincoln wrote in this kindly paternal vein:

"The advice of a father to his son, 'Beware of entrance to a quarrel, but, being in, bear it, that the opposer may beware of thee,' is good, but not the best.

"Quarrel not at all. No man resolved to make the most of himself can spare time for personal contention. Still less can he afford to take all the consequences, including the vitiation of his temper and the loss of self-control.

"Yield larger things to which you can show no more than equal right; and yield lesser ones, though clearly your own.

"Better give your path to a dog than be bitten by him in contesting for the right. Even killing the dog would not cure the bite."

### HIS "LEG CASES."

Judge Holt, the Advocate-General of the army, was presenting a number of death sentences to the consideration of the President. One case was that of a young soldier who had taken refuge behind a stump and broken the morale of his regiment by his exhibition of fear.

"Well," observed Lincoln, "I'll have to put that with my leg cases."

"Leg cases!" exclaimed the Judge. "What do you mean by leg cases, sir?"

"Why, why," said Lincoln, "do you see those papers crowded into those pigeon-holes? They are the cases that you call by that long title, 'cowardice in the face of the enemy,' but I call them, for short, my 'leg cases.' But I put it

to you to decide for yourself: If Almighty God gives a man a cowardly pair of legs, how can he help their running away with him?"

#### WHEN STANTON WAS MAD.

Secretary of War Stanton was very angry because an officer had failed to carry out an order, either through disobedience or from not understanding it.

"I believe I'll sit down," said Stanton, "and give that man a piece of my mind."

"Do so," said Lincoln; "write him now while you have it on your mind. Make it sharp. Cut him all up."

Stanton followed Lincoln's advice with alacrity. He wrote a most pungent and exceedingly candid rebuke. He read it to the President, who said:

"That's right; that's a good one."

"Whom can I send it by?" the Secretary wondered aloud.

"Send it!" said Lincoln, "send it! Why, don't send it at all. Tear it up. You have freed your mind on the subject, and that is all that is necessary. Tear it up. You never want to send such letters. I never do."

#### WHY HE TOLD HIS STORIES.

A party of officers, among them Colonel Silas W. Burt, interviewed the President on business for Governor Seymour of New York on a summer evening in 1863. As the party prepared to leave, a somewhat intoxicated major slapped

Lincoln on the leg and said with a significant look and emphasis:

"Mr. President, tell us one of your *good* stories."

Says Colonel Burt:

"If the floor had opened and dropped me out of sight I should have been happy. The President drew himself up, turned his back as far as possible upon the major, with a great dignity addressed the rest of us, saying:

"I believe I have the popular reputation of being a story teller, but I do not deserve the name in its general sense, for it is not the story itself, but its purpose or effect that interests me. I often avoid a long and useless discussion by others, or a laborious explanation on my own part, by a short story that illustrates my point of view. So, too, the sharpness of a refusal or the edge of a rebuke may be blunted by an appropriate story so as to save wounded feelings and may yet serve the purpose. No, I am not simply a story teller, but story telling as an emollient saves me much friction and distress.'"

## LINCOLN AND THE THEATER.

Mr. Carpenter, the artist, recommended to Lincoln that he see Edwin Forrest who was playing in the role of Richelieu at Ford's Theater. "Who wrote the play?" Lincoln asked. "Bulwer," was the reply. "Ah," he said; "Well, I knew Bulwer wrote novels, but I did not know that he was a play writer also. It may seem somewhat strange, but I never read an

entire novel in my life. I once commenced 'Ivanhoe,' but never finished it."

After seeing Booth in the *Merchant of Venice*, he said: "It was a good performance, but I had a thousand times rather read it at home, if it were not for Booth's playing. A farce or a comedy is best *played*; a tragedy is best *read* at home."

Pleased one evening with the acting of McCullough, who played Edgar to Edwin Forrest's Lear, he wished to compliment the actor, and asked his companion, Noah P. Brooks, "Do you suppose he would come to the box if we sent word?" The actor was sent for and as he stood in stage attire in the door of the President's box, the latter praised the performance.

A compliment to another actor turned out awkwardly. This actor had played the part of Falstaff to Lincoln's so hearty enjoyment that he sent the actor a brief note of praise. One evening Mr. Brooks, as he went into the President's office, observed the actor in the waiting room. When Brooks came in Lincoln asked him if any one were outside, and upon receiving the answer, said: "Oh, I can't see him! I can't see him! I was in hopes he had gone away. Now, this illustrates the difficulty of having pleasant friends in this place. You know I liked him as an actor, and that I wrote to tell him so. He sent me a book, and there I thought the matter would end. He is a master of his place in the profession, I suppose, and well fixed in it. But just because we had a little friendly correspondence, such as any two men

might have, he wants something. What do you suppose he wants?" He paused. "Well, he wants to be consul at London. Oh, dear!"

### A TALK ON TREES.

Francis F. Browne, in *The Everyday Life of Abraham Lincoln*, quotes the reminiscence of a lady who once rode with Lincoln, in the Presidential carriage, to the Soldiers' Home:

"Around the 'Home' grows every variety of tree, particularly of the evergreen class. Their branches brushed into the carriage as we passed along, and left with us that pleasant woodsy smell belonging to fresh leaves. One of the ladies, catching a bit of green from one of these intruding branches, said it was cedar, and another thought it spruce.

"'Let me discourse on a theme I understand,' said the President. 'I know all about trees, by right of being a backwoodsman. I'll show you the difference between spruce, pine and cedar, and this shred of green, which is neither one nor the other, but a kind of illegitimate cypress.'

He then proceeded to gather specimens of each, and explain the distinctive formation of foliage belonging to every species.

"'Trees,' he said, 'are as deceptive in their likeness to one another as are certain classes of men, amongst whom none but a physiognomist's eye can detect dissimilar moral features until events have developed them. Do you know it would be a good thing if in all schools proposed and carried out by the improvement

of modern thinkers, we should have a *school of events.*'

"'A school of events?' repeated the lady addressed.

"'Yes,' he continued, 'since it is only by that active development that character and ability can be tested. Understand me, I mean men, not trees; *they* can be tried, and an analysis of their strength obtained less expensive to life and human interests than man's. This is a mere whim, you know; but when I speak of a school of events, I mean one in which, before entering real life, students might pass through the mimic vicissitudes and situations that are necessary to bring out their powers and mark the caliber to which they are assigned. Thus, one could select from the graduates an invincible soldier, equal to any position, with no such word as fail; a martyr to right, ready to give up life in the cause; a politician too cunning to be outwitted; and so on. These things have all to be tried, and their sometime failure creates confusion as well as disappointment. There is no more dangerous or expensive analysis than that which consists of *trying a man.*'"

#### A MEETING WITH WENDELL PHILLIPS

A group of eminent Bostonians, among them Wendell Phillips, visited the President in January, 1863, their object being to discuss the manner in which the Emancipation Proclamation was being put into effect. These men were abolitionists, eager for aggressive action in the matter of extinguishing slavery. Lincoln's

policy was a slow and careful one, and much dissatisfaction had been expressed with it. It was at the suggestion of Ralph Waldo Emerson that Wendell Phillips and his friends sought this interview with Lincoln. Emerson never doubted Lincoln's integrity and good purpose. This meeting is described by Moncure D. Conway, who was one of the group:

"The President met us, laughing like a boy, saying that in the morning one of his children had come to inform him that the cat had kittens, and now another had just announced that the dog had puppies, and the White House was in a decidedly sensational state. Some of our party looked a little glum at this hilarity; but it was pathetic to see the change in the President's face when he presently resumed his burden of care.

"We were introduced by Senator Wilson, who began to speak of us severally, when Mr. Lincoln said he knew perfectly who we were, and requested us to be seated. Nothing could be more gracious than his manner, or more simple. The conversation was introduced by Wendell Phillips, who, with all his courtesy, expressed our gratitude and joy at the Proclamation of Emancipation, and asked how it seemed to be working. The President said that he had not expected much from it at first, and consequently had not been disappointed; he had hoped, and still hoped, that something would come of it after a while. Phillips then alluded to the deadly hostility which the proclamation had naturally excited in pro-slavery quarters, and gently hinted that the Northern people,

now generally anti-slavery, were not satisfied that it was being honestly carried out by all of the nation's agents and generals in the South.

"'My own impression, Mr. Phillips,' said the President, 'is that the masses of the country generally are dissatisfied chiefly at our lack of military successes. Defeat and failure in the field make everything seem wrong.'

"His face was now clouded, and his next words were somewhat bitter.

"'Most of us here present,' he said, 'have been nearly all our lives working in minorities, and many have got into a habit of being dissatisfied.'

Several of those present having deprecated this, the President said:

"'At any rate, it has been very rare that an opportunity of 'running' this administration has been lost.'

"To this Mr. Phillips answered in his sweetest voice:

"'If we see this administration earnestly working to free the country from slavery and its rebellion, we will show you how we can 'run' it into another four years of power.'

"The President's good humor was restored by this, and he said:

"'Oh, Mr. Phillips, I have ceased to have any personal feeling or expectation in that matter—I do not say I never had any—so abused and borne upon as I have been.'

"On taking our leave we expressed to the President our thanks for his kindly reception, and for his attention to statements of which

some were naturally not welcome. The President bowed graciously at this, and, after saying he was happy to have met gentlemen known to him by distinguished services, if not personally, and glad to listen to their views, added, 'I must bear this load which the country has intrusted to me as well as I can, and do the best I can with it.'"

### EMERSON'S VIEW OF LINCOLN.

Ralph Waldo Emerson, in February, 1862, was accompanied by Senator Sumner in a call at the White House. Emerson thus wrote his impressions of Lincoln:

"The President impressed me more favorably than I had hoped. A frank, sincere, well-meaning man, with a lawyer's habit of mind, good clear statement of his facts; correct enough, not vulgar, as described, but with a sort of boyish cheerfulness, or that kind of sincerity and jolly good meaning that our class meetings on Commencement Day show, in telling our old stories over. When he has made his remarks he looks up at you with great satisfaction, and shows all his white teeth and laughs. \* \* \* When I was introduced to him he said, 'Oh, Mr. Emerson, I once heard you say in a lecture that a Kentuckian seems to say by his air and manners: "Here am I; if you don't like me, the worse for you."' Lincoln being a Kentuckian by birth, the remark was delightfully appropriate.

“PLAY DIXIE. IT’S OURS.”

One of the finest utterances that ever came from the lips of a great leader was made by Lincoln on the night after Lee’s surrender. Friends were serenading him, and after a short talk by the President, in which he welcomed the South back into the Union, the band played popular patriotic airs such as “Columbia, the Gem of the Ocean,” “Star-Spangled Banner,” etc. Finally, Lincoln said to the bandmaster: “Play ‘Dixie’ now. It’s ours.”

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